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In Memoriam. 116

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QUEEN VICTORIA,

1837 — 1901.

A Sermon preached at the Dalston Synagogue,
on February 2nd, 1901, the day of Her
Majesty's Burial, by

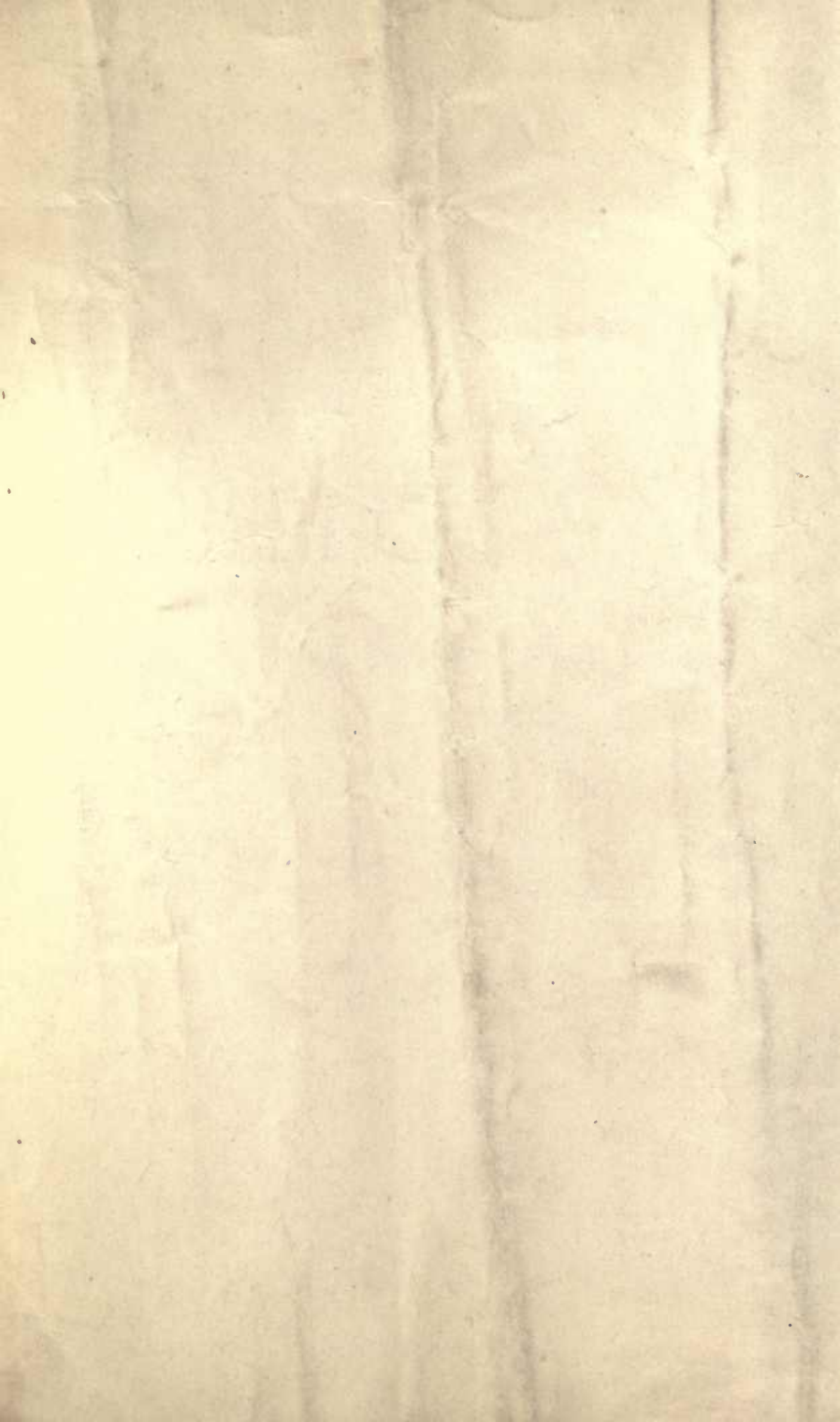
THE REV. M. HYAMSON, B.A., LL.B.

London :

WILLIS & Co., Printers, Lamb's Buildings, Bunhill Row, E.C.

1901.

With the Compliments of the Executive
of the Dalston Synagogue.



In Memoriam.

*A Sermon delivered at the Dalston Synagogue
on February 2nd, 1901, the day of the
burial of Her late Majesty, Queen
Victoria.*

TO-DAY, the voice of lamentation is heard in the streets. Every head is bowed, every heart is heavy, every eye is dimmed with tears; for the King of Terrors, no respecter of persons, who knocks with equal impartiality at the proud gates of the prince's mansion, and at the humble door of the peasant's hut, has entered our windows and snatched a flower of rarest worth, transplanted it in the garden of God, and left us so much the poorer. The passing of the illustrious ruler, whose earthly shell was borne some hours since to its last resting place, is poignantly felt, not only as a national calamity but also as a deep personal loss. Britain mourns, and all Civilization sorrows with our sorrow; shares our grief for her who has entered, thro' the dark portal, the realm of light eternal. Our late Sovereign's life exceeded the limit of fourscore years, which, the Man of God tells us, is the mark of extraordinary physical vigour. And yet few paused to reflect that, in the ordinary course of nature, at no distant interval, the silver cord would be severed and the golden bowl be broken. We, born under her

gracious sway, regarded Queen Victoria as a part of the British Constitution. We thought that Death had forgotten her, or been bidden by the Author of Life to pass her by, to spare her for an indefinite period. The news of her demise, after a brief illness, thrilled all with a shock of surprise. It seemed as if a majestic column, that had stood in solitary grandeur, long after its fellows had fallen and crumbled into dust, had at length, in its turn been riven from crown to pediment and come to the earth with a mighty crash.

Why this universal lament for one who had attained a hoary old age and had been gathered to the grave like a shock of corn, ripe for the reaper? The reason is to be found in the general feeling that the close of this noble life closes an epoch in English History. Queen Victoria's death rings the knell of the departed century—a century in which she was a conspicuous and central figure, of which she was the brightest ornament.

On the pedestal of the statue of one of her earliest advisers, the Hero of Waterloo,* may be read an inscription consisting of three words—simple, yet pregnant and charged with meaning,—“Wisdom, Honour, Duty.” Of the qualities here noted, the Queen was a living embodiment and illustration. Throughout her career, she had a high sense of the dignity with which Heaven had invested her. She possessed, however, at the same time, a clear perception and keen appreciation of the duties entailed by that dignity. To her, Kingship was no mere right of birth, no accidental privilege and prerogative. It was a solemn charge, a sacred trust. It is related that when, a child of twelve summers, she was informed that

* Wellington's Statue in the Guildhall.

she stood next in succession to her uncle, the reigning sovereign, she burst into tears and earnestly prayed that God might make her worthy of the high estate. The prayer was answered in the spirit in which it was offered. Six years later, when she mounted the steps of the throne, she took all hearts captive by her youthful charm and grace. She was not content, however, with the sweets of her exalted office. She aspired to wield its power. She was not satisfied to be a figure-head; her ambition was to be captain of the ship, real, and not merely nominal Head of the State. And she honourably realized her ambition. When, soon after her accession, Lord Melbourne, her first Prime Minister and trusted friend, once placed a State document before her with the request that it should be immediately signed, on the ground of its urgency and importance, the youthful sovereign rebuked her servant with the dignified reply: "It is still more urgent and important that I do not sign any paper before I have fully grasped and mastered its import and purport."

The position of a constitutional monarch in these isles, amidst the conflict of rival parties with clashing interests and opposing principles, is not an easy one. Yet, with such admirable tact did Queen Victoria fill her office, so evenly did she hold the scales, that none can, even at the present day, tell with absolute certainty in which direction lay her own political sympathies. Many sovereigns have been fortunate in their ministers. The Ministers of Great Britain, for the last six decades, have been, it is no exaggeration to say, fortunate in their sovereign. As years rolled on they learnt to rely with implicit confidence on her mature judgment and store of ripe experience, which gained her, in the opinion of those qualified to decide, the title "the wisest Statesman and most influential Monarch of modern times." How

much of the progress and development not only of these isles but of the whole of Europe is due to her calm counsels and sole moderating influence on her brother sovereigns, history has yet to recount.

She had her supreme reward in the love and affection, in the whole-hearted loyalty and devotion, in the ever-increasing reverence and veneration with which she inspired all sections of her subjects, who felt that the interest that lay nearest her heart was their weal, their permanent prosperity and happiness. They gave her a return, measure for measure. When the hand of affliction lay heavy upon her and she was bereaved of the partner of her youth, and then of sons, daughter, grandchildren, she was ever sustained by the solacing and comforting consciousness that the nation's heart was with her in her tribulation. The people respected her desire for seclusion and privacy. They knew full well that though the shadow that had fallen athwart her path had darkened her life, blighted her happiness, and made all gaiety distasteful, yet the splendid burden of Empire would continue to be nobly borne, and its heavy duties faithfully discharged by that noble woman.

What, you will ask, was the secret of her splendid greatness? What the root principle of her life? Whence did she draw the inspiration of her career? She was a witness of the influence of Religion on character and conduct. Strongly imbued with the conviction of the reality of God, fully realizing that the beginning of wisdom and the end of it was the Fear of Heaven, her anxiety was that her children might grow up in her strong faith. Hence her life, unaffected, transparently open and sincere, strenuous and laborious, was a lesson to all how

life should be lived. Her home, by its simplicity, was a pattern and model of how ideal a home might be made. Her court, unlike the courts of some of her predecessors, was not disgraced by political intrigues. There was no Court Party in the Houses of Parliament, for all, Commons, Lords, the whole nation, were of the Queen's Party. To her we may apply the Psalmist's words: "Thou didst love righteousness, and hate iniquity, therefore God anointed thee sovereign," by right human as well as by right divine.

We Jews owe her an especial gratitude, for never shall we forget that it was during her reign that we lost the Ghetto bend and learnt to stand erect. Sixty-four years ago, the Jew, even in this land of enlightenment, was a barely tolerated alien. He was excluded from the boon of a liberal University education. He was ineligible for State service. He was debarred from Parliamentary representation. What a marvellous change has taken place in two short generations, thanks largely to the example of good Queen Victoria. Nine years after her accession a Jew received the honour of a Baronetcy for services rendered not to this country but to his oppressed co-religionists abroad.* Twelve years later, success finally crowned the efforts of the City of London and the Borough of Greenwich to be represented by two Jews in the House of Commons,† and how many co-religionists have sat since then in the august Mother of Parliaments. In the next decade a Jew was appointed Solicitor General,‡ and, in due course, was elevated to the dignity of the Bench, where he rendered services admittedly weighty and of permanent value to English Jurisprudence. It is worthy of

* Sir Moses Montefiore in 1846.

† Baron Lionel de Rothschild in 1858 and Sir David Salomons in 1859.

‡ Sir George Jessel in 1872.

note that among the signatures appended to the Roll proclaiming Edward VII. King of Great Britain and Emperor of India are to be found the names of two Jewish commoners and one Jewish peer.

Change, Decay, Death, are in the inevitable order of nature. Blessed are lives lived on a high plane of noble thought and beneficent activity, wholly consecrated to duty. Thrice glorious is that career which, even after its close, rendered a service to Empire; for Victoria's death has knit together Britain's stalwart sons in a still stronger fraternal bond, the bond of a common sorrow, and the sympathy shown by foreign countries reveals "the one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin."

Queen Victoria fully deserves this universal tribute, for she served her people and humanity at the same time. By example, ever more potent than precept, she taught Kings not to extort an obedience inspired by craven fear, but through love to call forth love. Uneasy need not lie the head that wears a crown if it recognises, as the late Queen recognised, that to kingship belong duties as well as rights, and resolves to govern not tyrannically or arbitrarily but in Victoria's spirit, a spirit of justice, generosity, clemency, gentleness. States have by her reign been taught the value of constitutional monarchy in securing stability of government and continuity of policy.

Farewell, beautiful soul! Thy arduous labours have earned thee repose. As long as the Empire endures, so long will thy name, thy fame, the remembrance of thy glorious career, not be suffered to fade from the minds of Englishmen and Englishwomen. Ours be the task to raise to thee a memorial in our hearts; a memorial more

enduring than bronze tablet or marble monument ; and on it we shall engrave in indelible characters the three watchwords, Wisdom, Honour, Duty ; so that the glory of the era that will ever be associated with thy name, that will be known in history as the Victorian Epoch, shall not be eclipsed and extinguished with the eclipse and extinction of the light of thy pilgrimage on earth, but shall shine with increasingly radiant splendour under the sway of thy beloved son and successor, who enters on his heritage with the goodwill and good wishes, with the earnest blessings and the fervent prayers of all his subjects. May God prolong his days on the British Throne in health, vigour and happiness, in wisdom, worth and good fortune, and may his dynasty be established for ever.—Amen.

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